

(This talk is derived from my chapter for a book called, **Innovative Voices in Education: What It Takes to Engage a Diverse Community**) 45 mins then Q&A

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TALK TITLE

Combating our perceived texts of Violence through Cultivating Interfaith Understanding & 'Valuing Diversity' – reflections from my own journey.

SUMMARY

After 9/11, there has been much widespread confusion about 'the Other' and other peoples. This talk reflects upon my teaching experiences in schools and universities internationally. I argue that in a post 9/11 world schools and teachers worldwide wishing to convey to their pupils the values of good citizenship through combating their perceived texts of violence will have to introduce new and cutting-edge subjects, which should and must introduce ideas encouraging mutual respect and understanding.

Through innovative and stimulating classroom activities and case studies implementing the learning resource called '*Valuing Diversity: Towards Mutual Respect and Understanding*', which I initiated at the Centre for the Study of Muslim-Jewish Relations in the UK with the support of Dr Edward Kessler, (this learning resource book was distributed to 2500+ schools) we will see how stereotypes of other cultures and religious groups can be broken down one by one and replaced with acts of listening, accepting and respecting differences, finding common ground, leading to dialogue and deeper understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding cultures through my personal experiences and background

I approach this subject from the point of view of an anthropologist. Anthropology, in a nutshell, is the study of different cultures. The very subject of anthropology has gone through a great deal of refinement and change which is significant for the purposes of our argument: it began as a subject used by early Europeans—sometimes colonialists—to analyse and deconstruct society, often so-called 'primitive' societies.

Although these societies were described in great detail they were said to be 'savage', and other derogatory terms and phrases were commonly used to describe the peoples of different cultures—the most notable example in anthropology is Bronislaw Malinowski's extensive book: *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929).

Later anthropologists, especially those studying their own societies, argued that it was important to see society and its people from their own perspectives and not impose the values and ideas of other (dominant) cultures on lesser privileged/developed societies – or "OUR" ideas, values and framework on "THEM". These scholars were often non-European

and indigenous anthropologists who introduced an empathetic and, more importantly, ‘insider’s perspective’.

An Insider’s Perspective

As a Muslim woman studying my own society, I was able to interview an exceptionally large number of men, women and children to attain insight into an often misunderstood and sometimes misrepresented society: Pukhtuns from northern Pakistan specifically and Pakistan generally.

Earlier anthropologists (often male and European) had argued that women were ‘invisible’, ‘marginal’ and ‘ghost-like’ in this society—known as one of the largest tribal societies of the world— and that men played a key role in almost all aspects of political & social life.

Yet when I undertook fieldwork and research on the Pukhtuns for nearly a decade, I found that women played the most essential role by maintaining the very fabric of society— political and social networking—in their key dealings with other people by giving and receiving money during *gham-khadi* (events of *rites de passage*, such as, funerals and weddings, etc). Women, the Pukhtuns told me, are the key players in *zeest-rozgaar* which translates as ‘**The work of life**’ or ‘The **employment** of life’.

If women determined who to maintain social relations with and who to drop relations with they were active agents in their choice of maintaining a pattern in their social network which impacted directly on their husbands’ or fathers’ political and social standing.

In some current cases women decided to maintain relations with their own family (kin) and avoid relations with their husbands’ family (affines). So then, how, I wondered, did (male) anthropologists describe Pukhtun Muslim women as ‘marginal’?

The problem was obvious to me after research and reading on the area: it was a question of methodology – in a strictly segregated society, ‘outsiders’ were given little if any access to women and the women’s section of the house. Male guests were often entertained in the men’s house called the *hujra*, which is very clearly a male environment and not an appropriate space for ‘respectable’ women.

It was, therefore, a question of perspective: whereas, male Western anthropologists saw and defined Pukhtun society for the last four decades, in their books, as political and male dominated, an insiders’ perspective gave me a completely different picture of the very same society – where women were dominant, vocal and active deciders in their own social and political environment... In the recent elections of May 2013 in Pakistan in which I played an active role in the field – I witnessed women as feisty assertive agents - Bibiane (elite women), polling agents, workers, voters, and presidents of Union Councils – each manipulating and jostling for top positions and monetary gain in the difficult and challenging environment of Pakistan.

There was always another side to old accepted facts and stories. This was a valuable lesson that was reinforced in my mind after 9/11 while I was close to completing my PhD theses on Muslim Pukhtun women. I happened to be in Washington DC in the USA visiting

my parents when my husband called me from Pakistan to tell me about the horrific events of 9/11.

Watching the news on television that day was like watching a tragic and dramatic blockbuster movie such as *'The End of Time'* or *'Armageddon'* – the images were unbelievable and although the visual images seemed unreal, my heart sank at the horror and impact of what was happening – could this actually be reality!

News started pouring in pointing to Muslim names and Pakistani links and the then-President of the United States of America was using dangerous and explosive terms such as 'a crusade' and 'war' against the 'axis of evil'. The next few weeks, months and even years were witness to news headlines such as: WAR ON TERROR or more regularly: RED ALERT.

Sensationalist headlines had the effect of scaring both the Western public from people with Eastern names and cultures and it successfully alienated many people with eastern origins from mainstream society thus making even peace-loving easterners, and specifically Muslims, feel threatened and defensive about their identity, cultures and religion.

As a Muslim living in the Europe and visiting the States, I did not experience racism but in subtle ways. I was often asked questions like, 'where are you from? France?' and when I would say, 'Pakistan' this would be the end of our conversation. I wasn't surprised as Muslims in general and Pakistan in particular, unfortunately, receive negative press in a regular almost systematic way in the media. My husband who has coloured eyes and looks European (or "Italian", as he has been told) always received a cordial welcome from strangers who did not know that he was a Pukhtun from Pakistan but when once he told his colleague at the work-place that he went to Pakistan during the Christmas break, his colleague replied: "Did you bring back a bomb!"

The association of Islam in general, and Pakistan in particular, with violence in the West was something deeply disturbing for me as I understood and saw the gentler face of Islam and eastern culture through the love and compassion of my own South Asian Muslim parents and, heard the kind and lovingly parental voice of God in the Quran and other revealed books—God says that He loves us 99 times more than our own mothers— The Prophet of Islam is "*Rehmat al Alamin*": 'a mercy to all mankind'. Moses, Jesus & Mary, key male and female role models in Islam, stand out for their virtues of showing **mercy** and **compassion** to other human beings – a theme of religion commonly emphasized in all Abrahamic faiths.

Lessons from my own Background

My father, in his early youth, witnessed the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947—the senseless and brutal killings of Muslims, Hindus and the diverse people of the area did not make sense to a small boy who had lived side-by-side with people of different colours and cultures in a vast land called 'the Indian Sub-Continent'.

After partition, his local friends, home and land had changed abruptly. This taught my father to hold on to his own values of respecting and loving people even those different to him as he learned to see them all as **God's creation**. Being a mother myself, I know that the best way a child can learn is through watching their own parents: for many years after partition, when some people had no home to live in or food to eat they would turn up at my father's parents' home in Karachi in Pakistan.

My father says,

“Our rather large official Karachi house was shared by dozens of strangers who would turn up shattered and dazed sometimes with chits in their hands saying we were told to go to Ahmed Sahib and he will help you! My mother personally made sure they had food and a place to sleep. We had two tennis courts with tent-like structures for them.”

Such altruistic acts of compassion and of helping fellow human beings was something keenly observed by my father as a young boy and impacted his attitude towards others for the rest of his life.

He has spent more than four decades building relations in the public arena between people of different cultures and faiths: the lesson he continues to pass on to all of his children and grandchildren in many ways is: *hatred and violence continually creates further cycles of destruction but the values of respect and compassion are far higher, which help heal our fractured world.*

The importance of respecting diversity came from our families' **personal encounters** with different peoples from the world while living in South Asia, Europe and America. This helped us to learn to respect diversity and not take for granted the wonderful colours of God's world and nuances of the cultures and peoples God has created. We began to see this as something that is an essential component of making our shared world a richer place—after all the variety in our world (in, for example, animals, fish, plants, humans and so forth) is something to marvel and wonder at, as the Quran repeatedly reminds us.

Growing up in South Asia—home to more than several hundred languages—was an enriching experience. For me as an anthropologist, language was essential to understanding culture.

While we grew up learning fluent English in a post-colonial context in South Asia, our own mother and national tongues were so varied and multiple. This, I began to appreciate further when I went for higher studies abroad to the UK: whilst most English people just spoke English and had some exposure, at school, to at least one more foreign language, in South Asia, by contrast, we grew up with a background of being exposed to multiple languages (in some cases, more than 7 languages at a time!)

Insight from the UK: How my background and personal experiences enhanced my work—deconstructing stereotypes, connecting people and building understanding

The UK in general, at present, is a rich and diverse society. Although it benefits from being labelled as cosmopolitan, multi-cultural and multi-religious, officially it is a ‘secular’ society. Hence, when I held one of my first major interfaith conferences at the Guild Hall with senior members of the Abrahamic faiths and senior professors from the faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, the Mayor, insisted I continue with this “excellent and good” project to which he gave his full support, but that I should avoid using any term such as ‘religion’ in my invitation so as not to give the impression that the Mayor—a representative of the secular government—was hosting a religious event.

Yet, with the influx and migration of people from all over the world, especially from the Abrahamic religions there are now many people of different cultures and faiths living side-by-side in the UK. After the terror attacks on public areas and innocent citizens on 9/11 in the US and 7/7 in the UK, many inter-faith organizations have mushroomed from amongst these groups overnight. Meeting people from these faiths with so many similarities and yet differences, to make each unique, was a means of building relations and healing a multi-cultural society. There was no better way to do this, I thought, than to engage in learning about ‘Others’ through scholarship, personal encounter and teaching the subject.

Over the last decade, I have had the opportunity to lecture to and teach various levels of students at Cambridge, both at the University and outside from the private and public sectors of education. My courses focused on combating our scholarly works that portrayed the Other as “violent”.

At Lucy Cavendish College, the only mature women’s college at the University of Cambridge, I set up the Society for Dialogue and Action from where, working at the grass-roots with the general public, women from diverse classes and young people at schools, we offered courses, published teaching material for schools and held major conferences with the support of the Queen of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Rowan Williams, HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan, Professor Akbar Ahmed and the Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks.

All of these distinguished figures have spent a life-time connecting diverse people from different cultures in an attempt to build bridges to increase mutual respect and deepen understanding in our shared world. Each interfaith leader from their own perspective has approached the subject of looking at the Other problematically. Seeing the Other as “violent”, for instance, licenses an attitude to that Other of no respect.

Amongst the various educational projects I engaged in, the most notable was setting up a course that focused on deconstructing this attitude to the Other at the first-ever interfaith Centre, The Centre for the Study of Muslim-Jewish Relations (CMJR) in Cambridge. Although the CMJR was an independent institute, these were Cambridge University courses

and I had the privileged experience of Directing the Centre and outlining the courses and then teaching them.

Our students ranged from young teenagers to Imams, priests and rabbis. The topic of the course was 'Islam and Muslim Perceptions of 'the Other'' and 'Judaism and Jewish Perceptions'. As I was one of the tutors on the first course, I argued that it was important to study the historical relationship between Muslims and 'Others' and examine the perception of each about the 'Other through an examination of our texts and literary scholarship.

The courses made me realize that a positive relationship between the world's peoples could only be developed if we confronted our stereotypes about each other through examining scholarly literature (and the media).

It is important to confront those deep-seated negative perceptions which define our image of 'the Other' from our different points of view, deal with them and put them aside to begin afresh in a positive constructive way, so as to avoid the same mistakes of repeated confrontation through misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Other.

Teaching From an 'Inside Out' Perspective

During this time in a post 9/11 context in Cambridge I a senior school English Catholic teacher with a Protestant priest husband. I invited her in for green tea to my kitchen and the first question she asked me, "if I did not mind", was, "is Islam a moon religion? And do all Muslims become terrorists because their text says to kill all Christians and Jews?"

Although her questions seemed so bizarre and confirmed the far-fetched stereotypes of Islam, her directness had brought out all the ghosts from the cupboard rather than allowing her to walk around with them. Because now, we could turn to deconstructing these stereotypes and overcoming them step-by-step, question-by-question.

I explained that the core belief of Islam was in the One and Only God (who is also the God of Abraham, Moses and Joseph) and simultaneously working good deeds or righteousness. This included respecting God's world and his law of justice and respect for the Self and Others. The term 'Islam' is from *salaam* (like *Shalom*) meaning 'peace' and a Muslim is one who submits his or her ego (including his or her base human desires, such as, jealousy, greed and injustice)

to the higher values of God (based on ideals of righteousness, forgiveness, truthfulness and justice).

Some people who we hear about in the media, who happen to be 'Muslim', are violent due to **political** reasons, poor governance and lack of broad good-quality education including a lack of citizenship courses in their homelands, causing illiteracy, anger, hate, extreme poverty & lack of everyday security and facilities (imagine the reality for modern day people

in Pakistan – there is no electricity for fridges or fans and no gas to cook on for 18 hours per day in sizzling hot temperatures of 50 degrees C!).

My English Christian friend and I spent many hours and weeks in informal discussions and she soaked up everything I had to say about the diversity of the east and perceptions of ‘the Other’. On Islam, she even remarked with much surprise and simultaneous relief, and I quote her, “Jesus said that too!” The extreme perceived distance between us, as a Muslim and a Christian in dialogue began to disappear through the embrace of friendship, deeper understanding and personal encounter!

My friend’s husband – a priest at Ridley Hall, a college that trains priests at the University of Cambridge, invited me to teach a course on Islam at the Centre for Youth Ministry (CYM). My students would be youth workers, who I saw as “community healers”. The teaching room was packed with an array of young students aged about 21.

I began by asking students to write on the board anything that comes to mind when thinking about “Islam”, whether positive or negative. Each student was encouraged to participate. Some of the positive points about Islam in their minds were: ‘devotion’, ‘respect and fear of God’, ‘modesty’, ‘hospitality’, ‘community’ and ‘inclusion’.

And the negative aspects were: “Terrorism”, ‘honour killings’, and ‘gender oppression’. The negative were clearly, to me, cultural issues not religious. They also confirmed stereotypes of Islam which I had heard time and again – derived from “authoritative texts” on Islam, and reflected in the media.

In the the class, we discussed the important difference between the religion of Islam and the diversity of Muslim cultures and human behaviours, which the media often failed to point out when flashing fast images of incidents in the Muslim world.

We examined different books including passages from the Quran about the Abrahamic faiths or the “respected and protected” *ahl-e-kitaab* (People of the Book)—few of them had seen the Quran and non had ever heard of the following passages:

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, (Jews, Christians, Muslims, etc) except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong but say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit” (Quran, Surah 29; Verse 46),

and God tells all the Prophets and their believers:

“O ye messengers! Enjoy (all) things good and pure and work righteousness...and verily this Ummah (body of people/community – of all believers) of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord and Cherisher...” (Quran, Surah 23; Verses 51-52).

This is a significant verse as it brings all Jews, Christians and Muslims into the inclusive category of “us” as opposed to “them versus us”. Yet in current times the above Quranic message is sadly being ignored and even misinterpreted by stringent Muslims who, problematically for interfaith people like us, argue that Jews and Christians are not believers but *kafirs* – “unbelievers”. This puts “the Other”, for them, in direct confrontation with the self and denies respect or space of existence to them. The result is the burning of Christian communities as in Lahore and killings of individuals from “minority” communities as we have sadly seen in recent times in Pakistan. Yet ironically, not only Islam but Pakistan’s own founding ideology gives full respect and space to its minorities. The white in the Pakistani flag symbolises the rightful space given to minorities in Pakistan. The clash between extremist ideologies which is fuelled by Pakistan’s political disadvantages leads a few people to the extreme of killing others is in sharp opposition in the pendulum to the gentler face of the compassionate God, and his merciful people who forgive and love. This is a big challenge not only Pakistan is facing but a global challenge which people engaged in interfaith must put their heads together to overcome before it is too late!

As a class, we debated Bauben’s published PhD thesis on European scholars who wrote the essential texts on Islam. These scholars, often non Muslim, were “the authorities” on Islam and defined the very image of Islam for the West – some of their information although full of scrupulous details were flawed in their blatant bias against Prophet Muhammad and his family. Unfortunately, therefore, due to this lack of objectivity, the negative attitude to Islam and Muslims came across in literature and had an overflowing effect later onto the media and the public’s perception of the “Muslim Other”, leading to stereotyping and caricature building of this “Other”.

The slippery slope of the attitude of stereotyping one community today could easily flow onto another community tomorrow. Akbar Ahmed, for example, in his book, *Journey into America* (2010), hints that the initial attitude towards Jews when they first arrived in boats to America was the same dismissive one that almost whipped away all the native Americans (“the red Indians”), enslaved the African Americans (“niggers”, “blacks”), and more recently labelled the American Muslims as “neo-fascists” and “terrorists”.

So it is important to tackle this cancerous problem and deal with it for the sake our next generations and for building a peaceful harmonious world based on understanding and respect – or the biblical “give (even in attitude) what you would want for yourself”.

My class context gave my Christian students a safe and open environment to ask all the deep-seated questions that had troubled them but never-before been answered for them.

Following are some responses to the class (only related here not for lack of modesty but) to demonstrate the point that **the correct teaching tools can shift negative opinions towards positive dialogue and deeper understanding.**

One student, after that day, responded:

> “I thought the day was really positive and insightful. The teaching was informative and definitely provided opportunity for barriers that have been formed as a result of misunderstandings to be broken down...I could not fault the teaching style and content that was presented, nor the attitude with which it was put across!”

And from The Director of CYM:

Dear Amineh,

> “Thank you so much for your teaching. The feedback from the students was very enthusiastic. They were really challenged by what you had to say - and also extremely challenged by the depth and evidence of your faith and knowledge and the coherent manner in which you expressed that. This is a difficult module for them - the first time many of them will have spent extended time with people of other faiths - and you certainly went a long way towards dispelling some of the myths and caricatures - thank you for that! It would be great to have you teaching next year.”

> Peace,

> Rev Dr Steve Griffiths

> Director, Cambridge Centre for Youth Ministry

> Ridley Hall, Cambridge

In Pakistan to increase opportunities for women and men in higher education

With these experiences of teaching and learning about Islam and other faiths, it made me think that these old established and well-maintained institutes such as the University of Cambridge (more than 800 years old), or LSE are a brilliant metaphor for the West—knowledge is sacred and its value well understood in society; therefore, society here comparatively is thriving and its people, I find, are generally positive and constructive as most are mentally and physically occupied with various forms of work.

I want to offer the same educational opportunities to women and men in South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular. It is important to educate society through its women especially in a largely patriarchal culture that practices segregation:

“Give me educated mothers and I will give you an educated nation”

said Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the articulate founder of Pakistan. Yet, since the creation of Pakistan--one of the largest Muslim countries in the world--almost 6 decades later, there are few women’s non-government universities, nor any major interfaith centre/s in the country!

Although knowledge is highly valued in Islamic text (both the Quran and Hadith [sayings of the Prophet]. And *ilm* (the word for knowledge) was developed to the highest level amongst the Abrahamic faiths and other faith cultures under Muslim rule at different

periods of history in, eg, Andalusian Spain, and Morocco—giving it the name of ‘The Golden Age’—present people in Muslim societies (post-colonialism) have suffered due to lack of good-quality education that keeps a balance between Eastern and Western wisdom and knowledge.

In the war on terror, millions of dollars and Euroes have been poured into Pakistan, but not for the right reasons nor into the right hands – I would like to see this money redirected to making schools, hospitals and interfaith centres to build peaceful relations and genuine respect for the “Other”.

Having worked at some of the top universities in the world and seeing how education under the social welfare system benefits all citizens in the UK, it is my dream to set up a new cutting-edge shorter curriculum based on *Valuing Diversity: towards Mutual Respect and Understanding* to educate, as a first step, the estimated 200 million people in Pakistan.

Pakistan—a land of great cultural diversity and breath-taking natural beauty—is sadly often overshadowed in the media by its political instability, paradoxes and lack of social services and good-quality education.

As I returned to Pakistan recently, on my first encounter with its educational system, I found “good education” and the “love of knowledge” almost absent –The method of teaching “killed” the interest of students in studies, I was told by potentially brilliant students.

I have a vision of re-shaping certain subjects so that students passionately strive towards learning to widen their knowledge, as well as to utilize it in their lives.

“*I do not read. Full stop!*” said one young elite woman to me in fluent English. Although this lack of interest in reading may be the case anywhere else in the world, in this particular case it points to a crisis in present-day Pakistani culture where illiteracy is widespread, education opportunities minimal and many of the elite invest little time in reading and writing.

It is essential to encourage learning through reading! There are only a handful of libraries in Pakistan today and most under lock and key, although new, but very few, initiatives which include accessible and additional libraries have started opening, with centres for dialogue like *Kuch Khaas* in Islamabad.

The key, in this context, I thought, as the founder of Pakistan said, was to educate mothers in order to educate society. I have been told that setting up a non-government university and interfaith centre for women and men in Pakistan is a great challenge.

But I think that the challenge is well worth it if our subjects – based on ideas from the model of the learning resource *Valuing Diversity*—can help break down negative perceptions of the Other and help people respect each other through understanding and knowledge.

Today’s education, as it is, is not enough to enlighten minds and build respect and understanding for the “Other”. It has to be a different type of education, one in which, other cultures and peoples are given voice in our texts and respected while genuine attempts are made to understand them. Some of the attitudes towards the West in the Muslim world seem as out of touch as those toward Islam in the U.S. and Europe. But the misperceptions seem to step from a context of fear of what we don’t know and misguided belief in inaccurate

information. While there are, of course, many examples in both East and West of people who are open to other perspectives, we need to increase these numbers.

Education for a post 9/11 world

What type of texts and education are needed then to encourage deeper understanding and mutual respect in a post 9/11 world? One which seeks to find common ground while respecting differences, one of the guiding principles of interfaith and our text-book, *Valuing Diversity*. In the first stage of this text-book, we explore perceptions; through case studies we look at how we can value diversity, we look at needs and fears, we look at stereotypes in texts and in the media, we step into someone else's shoes. Finally, we explore dialogue and interfaith through communication cards and case studies of peacemakers.

In addition to being used in more than 2500 schools in the U.K., our text-book, *Valuing Diversity*, was also introduced to schools in Islamabad where at the American International School I was the chief guest on Cultural Diversity Day and presented the first copy to the head of the school.

I suggested that a new curriculum was needed for schools internationally—one which emphasized and encouraged redressing stereotypes and caricatures of 'Others' in literature and scholarly works and in which students would learn to question what they saw and heard on television and read in books and newspapers, an exercise I had become familiar with in my Sociology classes.

Here are some good questions, that came up, for interfaith leaders like yourselves: Privately, reflect upon your own prejudices because they do exist and can evolve throughout our lifetime. Understand how they came to be: Did your parents teach them to you? Did you have experiences with different ethnic or religious groups that formed these beliefs? Did the media or popular culture create these negative views? How do your prejudices affect what and how you teach certain material?"

I believe it is time for educational and interfaith institutes internationally to accept their responsibility for opening minds in our post 9/11 world. I would like to see a new curriculum in schools and universities around the world, one which will include **building blocks for interfaith and intercultural dialogue**, including critical analysis of what students see and hear around them, whether in their home life and community, or the media, or scholarly text books. Based on core values embodied in *Valuing Diversity*, people should be encouraged to:

- a) Respect other people's freedom to express their beliefs and cultural ways;
- b) Learn to understand what others believe and value and allow an expression of this in their own ways and on their own terms;
- c) Learn to respect the convictions of other peoples' food, dress and patterns of behaviour, and not behaving in offensive ways;
- d) Prevent disagreement from escalating into conflict and violence;
- e) Learn to listen to other people with sensitivity, honesty and kindness;
- f) Respect the right of others to disagree with our point of view;
- g) Avoid violent action and language;

- h) Read about other cultures and peoples;
- i) Overcome stereotypes of peoples and cultures in books, media and one's own personal beliefs through honest and scholarly discussions and interfaith and intercultural forums, such as here at the International Abrahamic Conference.

On the basis of the success of the learning resource text-book, *Valuing Diversity UK*, Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan, have asked me to found a new interfaith centre this academic year, the first of its kind, where with a small Pakistani-American team of academics we will introduce pioneering interfaith courses and textbooks for adults and the next generation to help increase deeper understanding and respect for the Other amongst students and the people of the region.

Conclusion

Finally, after my experiences as Founding Director of two interfaith centres in Cambridge, and now an additional one in South Asia, I have found that the only way to overcome misconceptions (in text-books, the media, etc) is to eliminate stereotypes by making interfaith dialogue an intrinsic part of our education systems. In countries, like Pakistan, it is needed especially because its founding fathers, the Quaid and Iqbal, created the country on the basis of respecting "the Other", yet unfortunately so many have lost their lives in this current mad cycle of intolerant violence towards the "Other". We must begin to look into ways of introducing pioneering interfaith courses in our schools and universities worldwide.

In addition to making recommendations for what needs to be done, the *Valuing Diversity* text-book is an illustration of how we can open minds if we challenge students of the next generations to understand "the Other." Thus, we hope that it becomes the model for what works.

It is my hope that a similar curriculum and additional adult dialogue could be introduced worldwide to help people **understand, respect and value** "the Other".